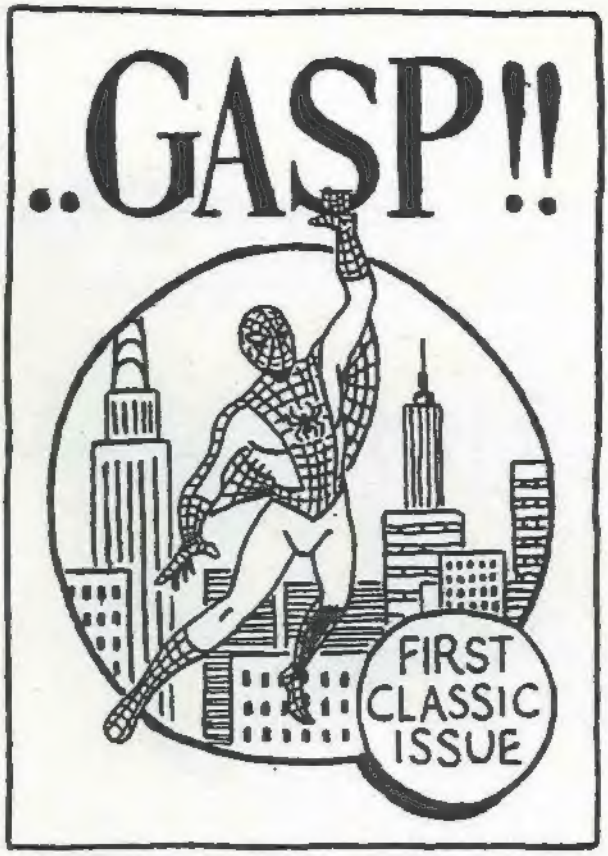
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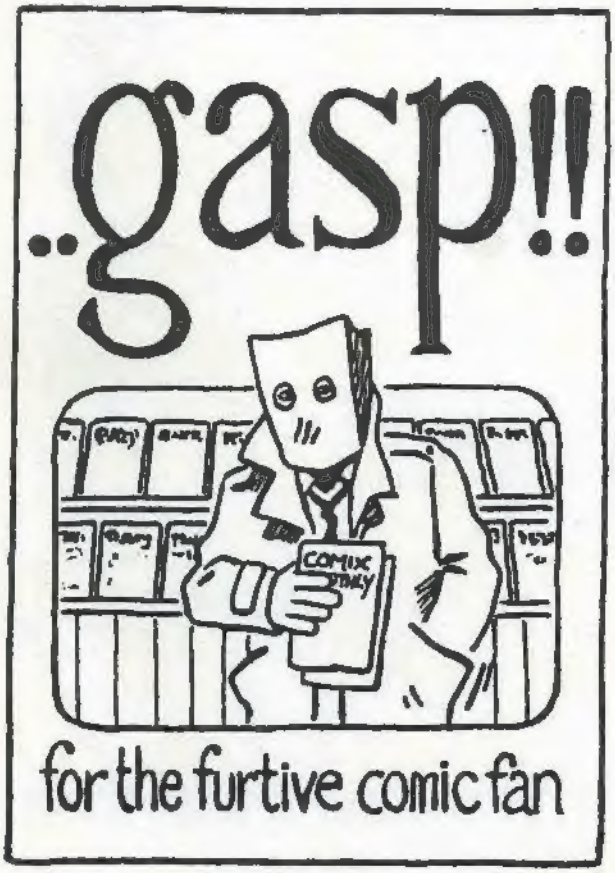
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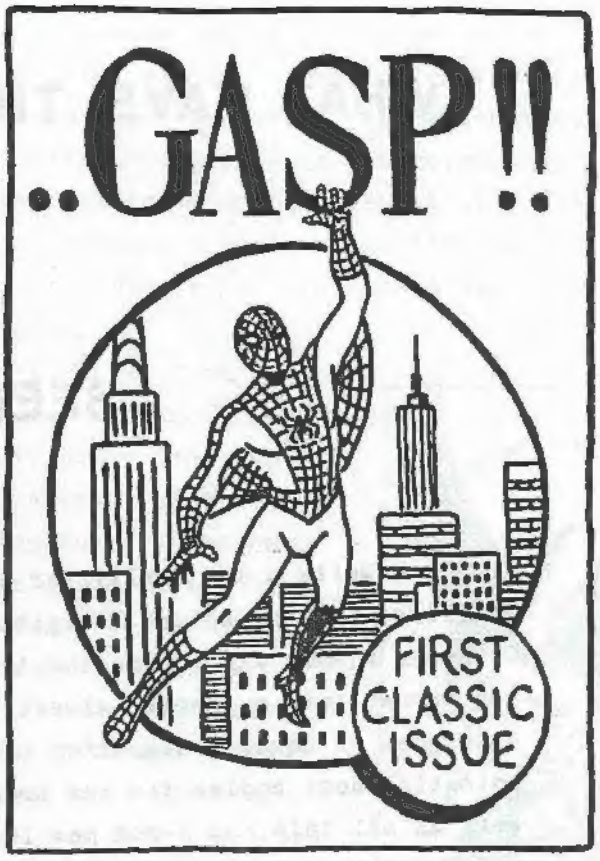


editorial

[redacted] 82

GASP is the fanzine from beyond the time barrier - the deadline barrier,to be exact.In an attempt to prove that fanzines don't need to take five months to produce,GASP has been conceived, created and completed in approximately three weeks,which,I feel,must be some sort of record.So if there are any rough edges on this publication, please make allowances for time.

GASP is the first,but hopefully not the last,production of the Friends of Don Heck(please don't sue us,anybody !)who meet every Tuesday at 8 in the Whitehall pub,Renfield St.(opposite the Odeon) to drink,swap comics,criticise the X-Men,and drink!I don't quite know how the altogether more serious idea of bringing out a fanzine arose;nor how I got lumped with editing it!On the whole though,I think we've accumulated a stimulating package,reflecting our varied interests,ranging from the ultra-mainstream(X-Men and Daredevil)to the slightly more esoteric(Pacific Comics, a history of Hydra,Shade the Changing Man),and taking in along the way a fascinating examination of the reality of the comics multiverse by Glasgow's answer to Mark Gruenwald,John Cuibard,a slightly lighter article on the joys of comic-hunting and a comment on the future of comics distribution by Glasgow dealer,Neil Craig.There should be something there for everyone!

GASP is available for 40p($1.50in America)plus postage if neccessary.Money,zines in trade,and,hopefully,letters,should be sent to;

Danny McCabe,22,Ledmore Dve.,Drumchapel G15 7DS.

CREDITS - p.16.

Lilian Edwards

WHAT HAVE THE X-MEN BEEN UP TO THIS YEAR ?

Quite a lot really.For instance;they defeated a plot by the Hellfire Club to capture Kitty;they've seen the return of Scott's father, Colossus almost died twice,they've fought alongside the Starjammers,Storm was turned into a vampire(albeit temporarily),Colossus's sister Ilyana has undergone an equally startling transformation,and right now they are the potential host bodies for the brood,a rather repulsive race of aliens.As well as all this,the X-Men has lost its status as Marvel's best-selling comic and Dave Cockrum,after having done 9 of the last 12 issues,has once again decided to leave the book;his replacement will be newcomer Paul Smith.

To expand on the above,I'm going to do a short review of each of the past twelve issues,that is,152-163.

152"The Hellfire Gambit" was the wrap-up of the plot by Sebastian Shaw and co. to get rid of the X-Men.Their first step was to get hold of Kitty Pryde legally,then,using some transferral device,Storm and the White Queen's personae were swapped about.This,of course,was intended to lure the X-Men to their destruction by the old traitors-in-the-ranks trick.Somehow,Claremont always manages to make an old idea seem almost new,though - a tribute to his writing skills,I guess.Anyway,after a rather vicious fight between Ororo and Frost,the X-Men win the battle,leaving the Hellfire Club to fight another day.(They'll be back in the new New Mutants book,debuting soon).

153"Kitty's Fairy Tale" was a rather cute little story featuring the X-Men as various "characters",which was basically a variation on X-Men 137 with a happy ending for all.Chris had promised us "the most heart-rending story of the year";well,it wasn't exactly that,"touching" would be a better description.To see Scott and Jean finally getting married was a lovely move,even if it was only in Kitty's imagination,and judging by

the last panel,I think Scott agreed.

154"Reunion" is the beginning of a story which,10 issues on,isn't showing any signs of finishing.The main point of this issue is Scott's dis-covery that his father is still alive and that the rest of the X-Men have known that fact now for 46(!) issues.Scott obviously feels bitter,and says as much,but he really doesn't have much time to do anything about it as he is too busy discovering that his father is being chased by the Sidri,a collective organism with a considerable resistance to harm.A good beginning to a story which so far has been excellent.

155"First Blood".I really can't think of anything to say about this issue except that it was brilliant.This issue introduced the Brood(they have got to be the ugliest things Marvel has ever produced)and provided a nice balance between action and story development.The apparent death of Colossus was rather a shock on which to end this issue;I personally wonder how Peter managed to survive such a violent attack - I suppose the spike must have managed to miss all his vital organs.Baddie-of-the-issue really must be Deathbird - she's the first female villain I've developed an instant dislike for,and that includes her appearance in Avengers a few years back.This issue had me dying to see how Colossus could get out of being dead. I wasn't disappointed.

156"Pursuit" featured another rather despicable character,Admiral Lord Samedar,plus the return(hooray)of the Starjammers,and sufficiently spectacular it was too, but the most incredible thing I've seen in ages has to be that ship of the brood's;it was almost beautiful.The one poor aspect of the issue was Peter's too-swift recovery - only a few hours after being mortally wounded,he's back to full strength,and not a scar to be seen.Meanwhile the X-Men have 6 hours to get back to Earth,and need 24! Great stuff!

157"Hide'n'Seek".Nightcrawler and Kitty save the world(sort of),Colossus has a relapse and Professor Xavier is knocked into a coma by the Brood.All in all,a pretty eventful issue.This time the Phoenix returns,it's Kitty using a device for changing the clothes and appearance of a person;the easiest way of telling that its not really Phoenix is that Kitty's figure isn't,um,"full" enough.This issue effectively closed the first part of the ongoing storyline - the next 4 issues are really to give Claremont a chance to try out a couple of new plots.

158"The Life That Late I Led".It was nice to see the return of the Brotherhood(!) of Evil Mutants,even if only for one issue.Is there any reason why Rogue should look so much like Wolverine?Rogue has a Southern accent and Logan is a Canadian.I wonder if they might be brother and sister seperated since birth?Nah,can't be.The CCA would never have passed the last two panels on p. 13 if they were.

159"Nightscreams" is this years bummer.Why is it that the only person who can handle Dracula is Marv Wolfman?Every guest appearance that Drac has made in recent years has been terr-ible.Bill Sienkewicz's pencils didn't help much.His work on Moonknight is brilliant but he doesn't suit the X-Men at all.Chris tried to write a good story,I'll give him that,but,somehow,I never thought of it as a story in the real Marvel Universe,it was more like a dream sequence.Thankfully,it was fully resolved in this year's annual.The best thing about the issue is probably its cover - it's a pity the inside wasn't as nice.

160"Chutes and Ladders".This issue reallymade up for the last,in spades!It gets my vote as story of the year.The X-Men are transported to a dimension where,basically,anything goes.They can be young or old,good or bad,dead or alive.Fantastic!And at last something has been done with Illyana.Aged 8 years in a second?What'll happen next?She's about the same age now as Kitty was when her powers first manifested themselves,so perhaps we'll see any latent powers that Illyana possesses now.Whenever I see references to books or films in a comic coming as a statement from one of the characters,I often wonder whether the writer is imposing his own taste on the reader,or whether he is just trying to give us an idea of what his characters like to read,such as when in this ish Kitty mentions Larry Niven,and "stepping disks".

161"Gold Rush".The nicest part of this issue was the discussion that Scott and Ororo had.It was good to see Scott opening up to someone as I don't think he's really done that since the night of Bobby Drake's 18th birthday party.I may be in the minority,but I would like to see a romance developing between these two,although I know Ororo seems to prefer aggressive men.Most of this issue was taken up by the Professor's dream,in which we found out a little more about Magneto and what makes him tick,and established that Charles and Magnus had been good friends,albeit with a few differences.(It's a pity Stan didn't know this 19 years ago.)I wonder if Xavier's baldness is a by-product of his mutant abilities?

162"Beyond The Farthest Star" is a Wolverine solo story,appearing at the same time as the second issue of his own mini-series.I suppose it's really a horror story.The Brood's queen has implanted her eggs in all the X-Men and when they hatch,they'll all be turned into "sleazoids" as Wolverine puts it.Luckily enough for Wolverine,he discovers he can't be taken over because of his adamantium skeleton.So its now up to him to try to save - or kill - the rest of the X-Men before the eggs hatch.It's always good to see Wolverine in solo action because he can really cut loose unlike the rest of the team,who always hold back - even against the Brood.

163"Rescue Mission".Recent X-Men stories have been full of weird,almost abstract writing,dreams,nightmares,strange dimensions.This issue has a pretty terrifying nightmare of Scott's,wherein he finds that all the X-Men including a mirror-image of himself,have been transformed into sleazoids. He doesn't try to resist his own transformation until he sees an image of the Professor telling him to fight all his fears.He does,then wakes.It doesn't sound like much here,but reading it over it is pretty chilling, especially when we know it's not that far from the truth.....

As far as I know,this story will conclude in the double-sized issue 165,which will also see the debut of Paul Smith.Issue 164 will be Dave Cockrum's swansong on the X-Men;his next project is to be a graphic novel for Marvel,featuring a new concept of his own.

So,my overall verdict on the past year is that the X-Men is still at the top of my list of "must-buys".If the next year of the X-Men is half as exciting and enjoyable as this one was,it'll still be a wonderful book.

Danny McCabe

A BRIGHTER shade OF PALE

Lilian Edwards

Steve Ditko is perhaps one of the few talents in the world of comics who truely needs no introduction. Few fans can be unaware that in the Sixties with the collaboration of Stan Lee, he created Marvel's most successful superhero, the webslinging Spider-Man, and the perhaps less commercial but more innovative Dr. Strange. Since those days however, Ditko has had more trouble in finding the correct outlet for his highly idiosyncratic style. For DC, he single-handedly created several short-lived strips, such as the Creeper; at Charlton, he worked on the revised Captain Atom and Blue Beetle strips to considerable later fan acclaim but less immediate commercial success; back at Marvel he was placed on books such as the destructively ordinary Machine Man, where his talents were ill-used, and his lack of interest showed. (Ditko has persistently, and perhaps wisely, refused to return to his former Marvel creations.) In the alternative or fan press, Ditko worked on a number of creations reflecting his far right-wing and indeed nigh-on Fascistic views, notably the famous and ruthless criminal-killer, Mr. A, whose character was foreshadowed by Charlton's The Question. In my opinion, however, the strip on which Ditko has most aptly deployed his unique skills of both art and plotting since his early Lee-collaborations, is undoubtedly the largely-ignored and sadly short-lived Shade the Changing Man.

Shade, an all-Ditko production except for Fleisher dialogue (as one letter-writer commented, why couldn't Kirby have thought of that?) ran for 8 issues in 1977-1978 and then, like all good comics, was cancelled. From start to finish, its two great strengths were its complex, fast-moving and ever-twisting plot-line, and, naturally, Ditko's art. Lacking both the simplistic fisticuffs-and-skintights approach to appeal to the average 12-year old, and the mawkish characterisation-dependency so beloved of Claremont and his ilk, Shade failed to command either the mainstream or the nascent fannish market; nevertheless, it stands as one of the finest comics of the period. Shade refused to be neatly categorised into one of the pre-determined genres; it was a mixture of science-fiction, fantasy, super-heroics

and detective/espionage fiction,and by implication,its leading character, Rac Shade,was not in any sense the normal "superhero" out to fight for truth,justice and the American way,but rather a man wrongly condemned to death for treason and murder,hunted on all sides oy his former lover and friends,simultaneously menaced by the underworld,and trying desperately to establish his innocence.

Shade himself was a securfty agent,gifted with no natural super-human powers,but who had acquired an advanced scientific device,the M-Vest which generated a force-field,enabled him to fly and responded to the emotions of either Shade himself or his enemies,by projecting what seemed to oe somewhere between an illusion and a reality that his body was growing ....changing.While an original superpower(and there are precious few of them),the M-Vest's greatest advantage was in its very visual nature - when Shade went into action,there was no needfor explanatory captions,and Ditko utilised its effects for some very striking panels.Look for example at the cover of issue 4 where Shade's face is distorted into a leering,horrible mask;or of 7,where his merely human shape is extended in vivid colour by the force-field's aura.

The setting was as unconventional as the hero;not Earth,or even some familiar parallel universe,but a wholly new concept of a "Meta-Zone" which could be reached from Earth(known as the Earth-Zone)via the Zero-Zone,a weird area where physical rules did not apply,reminiscent of a Phantom Zone inhabited by hideous creatures.This backdrop cleverly allowed Ditko to use his most potent artistic gift ,the drawing of strange and unEarthly landscapes,as seen in both the ultrascientific buildings and technology of Meta,and the totally alien Zero-Zone,especially its Area of Madness.As another letter-writer said,"not even Doc Strange in his hey-day was this weird" as Ditko went to town on bizarre monsters,swirling clouds and dazzling colour-schemes.

Nor did Shade lack unusual opponents,along the way to proving his innocense.In eight issues,he faced more memorable antagonists than Superman meets in fifty;among them,Form,an amorphous and vicious villain-ess,the Cloak,with his powers of invisibility,Khaos,Lord of Terror,whose heat powers were an excellent visual complement to Shade's changing powers and best of all,Sude the Supreme Decider,whose name I feel sure was a pun (for "Pseud"),for this seemingly fearful metal monster was truely a mere shell for a crippled woman and respected member of government,the mother of Shade's lover,Mellu.

This combination ,therefore,of a cryptic hero,unusual adversaries, highly original visuals of persistently excellent quality,and a convoluted plot,conspired in Shade to produce a truely exciting bo k,and one which I

and many others mourned when it was cancelled in the DC Implosion.I have not even attempted to describe the story-line - preparatory to writing this article,I attempted a "quick syhopsis" of various issues,only to discover such a thing was near impossible;so I'll excuse its absence on the virtuous grounds that it would spoil the series for new readers attracted by this epitaph.A few odd points,though,can be made.One feature which seemed particularly strange to me,was that the hero of a strip created by Steve Ditko,arch-libertarian,and Michael Fleisher,known for his Spectre's and Ghost Rider's summary vengeance on criminals, should be an innocent man,wrongly sentenced to death;for this situation would seem to be one of the primary arguments against the brutal treatment of criminals advocated by Messrs.Ditko and Fleisher. Perhaps by allowing Shade to prove his innosense, Ditko was saying that the truely good will always win through-though this seems a little unreal on Earth-Prime,where there are no M-Vests knocking about.

Perhaps if Shade had not been cancelled,it would (cont.)have gone downhill - certainly,the approaching end of Rac's quest would have made it more difficult to continue the breakneck plotting and imbue it with such a compelling sense of urgency.As it was, though,the strip ended with several plot-threads hanging and since then nothing has been done to tidy them. Surely a satisfying final appearance for the Changing Man is not too much to ask for one of DC's most sparkling and original concepts.

THE LURE OF THE HUNT

Bruce Saville

A splash of water hits his trouser leg as his foot lands in a puddle.The wind blows the rain into his face once more.He looks to his left and sees a small lane across the road.He moves his weary feet once more and aidles down the lane.For hours he has walked on his quest with no fulfillment.But at the end he sees a small,run-down establishment. Going to the window,he peers through the grime-encrusted glass and sees some dusty tomes.Sensing the end of his search,he pushes open the creaky door and brings a tired ring from the bell over the door.To the left he sees some peeling paperbacks,on the right,shelves of second-hand technical books.He ventures farther in and breathes in the dust of old paper.Then,in a corner,he sees a pile of assorted magazines on an old chair.Moving to it he leafs through the pile and finds at last some specimens of the looked-for object.Discarding the myriad copies of Shogun Warriors,he uncovers an old Avengers 27.Picking it up with reverence,he checks its pelt,then looks through the yellow-tinged interiors as the aroma of the comic touches his nostrils.All the hours of weariness lift immediately from his shoulders as he pays the proprietor the three pence neccessary to become the comic's sole owner.

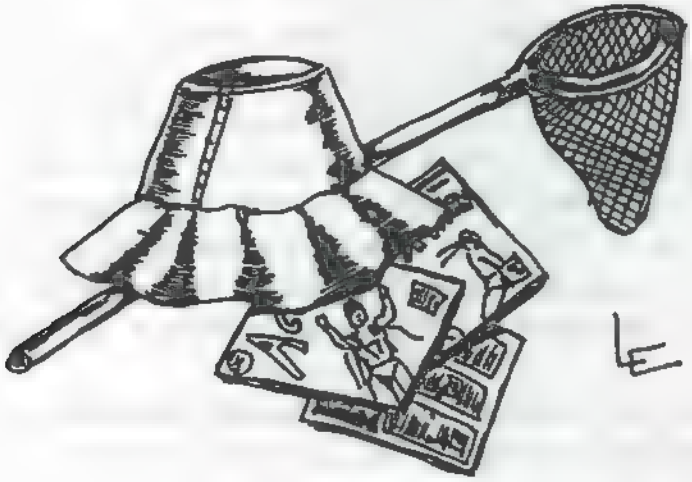
Okay,that's a very romanticised view of comic-hunting,but it does illustrate one of the joys of comic collecting.The gradual acquis--ition of your collection is a joy difficult to communicate to non-collectors and one of the less obvious attractions of comics.Of course,it is one facet of collecting that is universal.A comic collector can understand perfectly what a collector of beercans feels when he acquires one he hasn't got.However,while the joy is the same,the methods have changed very significantly.Going hand-in-hand with the acquisition is the search for that comic.In the early days of your collection,it is anyone of that title you haven't got.Then it becomes the non-distributed or rare,finally ending in you not being a completist and only looking for comics by favourite artists/writers.But now the acquisition is easier and the search has lessened.

For your comics,you'd look through newsagents,old bookshops etc.to get what you wanted.Occasionally,you would acquire comics from fellow collectors.From strange sources you would get them,but the process was slow.Not now though,with comic shops and marts.

While the situation is reasonable at small marts and shopsas most of their stock is easy to get or stuff you don't collect,the massive amount of comics at huge London marts astounds you.Personally,I found a deep sorrow when on walking into American comic shops,they had shelves of boxes containing complete collections of all the Silver Age Marvels.Of course,I know there is a vast amount of old comics floating about in the States, but that still didn't prepare me.In actuality,all I bought from these shops were Daredevil 2,3,4,and 78.

That wasn't always the case though,as I found when I went to the World SF Convention in Denver.There weren't that many comics dealers there and it was back to searching through boxes.There I picked up many bargains like DD 1 for 20 dollars and some very fine Adams Batmans for two dollars apiece.Things like that brought back the cheer.There seems no point in looking when you can tell them that you want such-and-such and they just hand it to you.Fortunately,while this is the case with Marvel,it is not so much with DC or the others.I haven't yet seen a mart or shop that had,say, an almost complete run of Batman since the new look,or all the JLA from number 1.If you know,don't tell me.For me,that is one of the joys of DC. All the showcase titles,the one-off specials,the DC compilations featuring some stories which are reprints,and some which are original,and trying to work out which is which.

To me,agony is where you just pick up any Journey into Mystery that you have the money to buy.I love it that in Britain we have the long stretch of genuine hard-to-get non-distributed Avengers and have to try to find them at reasonable prices.Of course,I enjoy the other joys that are unique to comics,the artwork,writing,characters,etc.,but let's not forget the joy of the searching-for,and final acquisition,of a long-looked-for comic.



A HISTORY OF THE HORDES OF HYDRA

(Typed by John Culbard, from the narration of an anonymous informant.)

Hail Hydra! Immortal Hydra! We shall never be destroyed.
Cut off a limb..and two more shall take it's place.
We serve none but the Master, as soon the world shall serve us!
Hai Hydra!

The early origins of the organisation that was to become known as Hydra are closely tied in with the hectic war years of Imperial Japan. It's founder, believed to be a graduate of the Buddhist warrior-priest Nissho Inoue's secret terrorist society, Ketsumeidan (The Blood Brotherhood), used the confusion of war to create links with the crime-lords of the Yakuza, with renegade elements of the Kempo Tei secret police, and with the most powerful of all secret societies, Kokuryuka (the Black Dragon Society). By early 1942, using criminal funding and secret military contacts, the founder was able to raise his own forces of disaffected minions, but the organisation was still little more than an insular secret society. The name of this initial group is no longer known, but it is suspected that it's symbol was the many-headed serpent prevelant in many Asian mythologies.

It was not until the end of 1942 that the founder was able to carry out his plans for expansion, when fortune brought the Prussian militarist Baron Wolfgang von Strucker, now dangerously out of favour with Hitler, to Japan. Regarded by the founder as a modern ronin, or warrior without a master, Strucker became the leader of a new strike force, who would operate silently and swiftly, acquiring top secret military blueprints and weaponry from the arsenals and research units of many nations. It was not long , however, before the founder realised the immenence of a power coup, and attempted to kill Strucker. Strucker was not caught off gaurd , and after the demise of the founder at his hands, Strucker declared himself Supreme Hydra. Indeed it was now that the organisation was first known as Hydra, after the multi-headed dragon of Greek myth, which Strucker saw as being an apt simily of the concepts he envisioned within the group, and the inspiration of the chilling ritual oath.

In early 1943 he began construction of the first Hydra Island base on a desolate isle in the Banda Sea, 500 miles north of Darwin. While Hydra continued to plunder under the confusion of war, Strucker was also recruiting mercenaries, strategists, and scientists, in order to create an atomic device pieced together from stolen equipment and re-

search data on the now completed Hydra Island. In November 1943, the audacious plan was foiled by the simultaneous intervention of U.S. and Japanese special units. Strucker, escaping in a mini-submarine, detonated the island and removed all factual evidence of Hydra from hope of recovery by either nation.

Hydra sections had already been established in many countries, and it was through these that Strucker continued to operate through the last days of the war. No longer an Asian secret society, Hydra's mercenary forces were to gain a new source of recruits which would twist it further into a cancer of civilisation. With Nazi Germany falling before the Soviet hammer and the Allied anvil, many officers and soldiers from the numerous SS regiments were seeking escape through various escape routes run by Der Organisation der SS Angehorigen, or ODESSA, the organisation for SS members. With his contacts within the German military, it was with little difficulty that Strucker proposed Hydra as a potential refuge for those unwilling to lay down the sword.

Little is known of Hydra's activities in the late 40's and early 50's, as they spread slowly and insidiously, consolodating existing groups. It was only the need for further funding in the late '50's which led the Hydra Bruderschaft, or Brotherhood, as the ex-SS men called themselves, to operate openly. The plan to retreive a hidden Nazi gold cache, whose location was programmed into the mind of then concentration camp internee, Gabrielle Heller, necessitated a strike into Isreal to snatch the girl and force her to reveal the exact location of the gold near Lake Rudolf in Kenya. Involved in the affair, unfortunately for Hydra, was psychic mutant, Prof. Charles Xavier, who saved Gabrielle with the aid of fellow mutant, Magnus (soon to become Magneto), who then hijacked the gold and buried the Bruderschaft.

This setback did not stop Hydra gaining funds elsewhere and expanding their various facilities into the United States. Hydra had initially infiltrated the States during the anti-communist era of the early '50's, when extremist, right-wing fanatics were easy targets for Hydra's underground propaganda, and for frustrated, unfulfilled Arthur Brown, chartered accountant and private secretary to business man, Leslie Farrington, Hydra beckoned like a beacon. Manipulated no doubt, by Strucker, Brown quickly rose through the ranks, financing himself with the easily embezzeled funds of Farrington's 'Imperial Industries International', until, via the now strategic post of Hydra New York, he became putative Imperial Hydra, and began to build up Hydra's aggressive capabilities.

In 1965, with SHIELD now fully operational under Col. Nick Fury, the war against Hydra had began. Numerous early battles were fought, including an open attempt by Hydra stormtroop auxilaries, to kill Fury by destroying the Baxter Building during the wedding of Mr. Fantastic and Invisible Girl.

Yet it was to be with SHIELD's eventual destruction of Hydra's New York headquarters, and the death of Arthur Brown, that the true extent of Hydra revealed itself. Almost immediately SHIELD was threatened by Mentallo and the Fixer, who, by their later involvement with Hydra, must have been backed by them at this time. This was swiftly followed by the appearance of AIM (Advanced Idea Mechanics) and the Secret Empire. It was soon revealed that both organisations had been created by Them, an alias of Hydra, and operated, at this time, under their direct control. In 1966, once these groups had served their purpose in holding the attention of intelligence and active field personnel, Hydra re-emerged stronger than ever from their subterranean base under the Egyptian ruins of Karnopolis, with a plan to use the dread 'OVER-KILL HORN'. Fortunately Fury reprogrammed the flying weapon to destroy Karnopolis, but Strucker, previously operating under a series of disguises, infiltrated SHIELD's Heli-HQ as Agent Bronson, and is able to sabotage SHIELD security for an assassination bid on Fury by the AIM developed Dreadnought killer-robot. Another Hydra-double infiltrator causes massive damage before his death. With SHIELD HQ out of action, and beleiving Fury to be dead, Strucker returns to the new Hydra Island in order to release the Death Spore, and decimate Mankind prior to Hydra's ultimate domination. However, Fury is not only alive, having stowed away on Strucker's craft, but is on the island, where he and the Supreme Hydra come face to face for the first time since 1942. During the ensuing dual Strucker falls into a lethal alpha particle reactor cube and Fury escapes as Hydra Island, now hermetically sealed, becomes the only victim of the Death-Spore.

The death of Strucker, and the loss of Hydra Island, fragmented Hydra and left it in no position to be a major threat, although individual local bases remained. It was also at this time, that AIM achieved total independence from the last of it's Hydra links.

In 1968 Hydra-New York, under the control of Madame Hydra, attempted to contaminate the city's water supply, only to be stopped by Captain America and Rick Jones. Unknown to Hydra, however, Madame Hydra was displaced into limbo, and replaced by the Space Phantom in her guise, and when she seemed to die, he assumed another guise and continued as a new, self-proclaimed Supreme Hydra.

By I969 Hydra-New York had fully recovered and the regional controller had instigated an unsuccessful plan to discredit Nick Fury, followed by an assassination attempt by a hired assassin called Bullseye, who was shot down after killing a Life Model Decoy.

In I970, led by a 'Supreme Hydra', a small unit attempted to capture the Hulk, for use as a weapon. The survivors managed to escape in a life-craft. Over the next two years Hydra seemed to be quiescent, but during this period the Kingpin's son was involving himself with Hydra via his underworld contacts, reorganising it's scattered forces, and eventually becoming nominal Supreme Hydra, while pretending to be a pawn of his father, in order to satisfy the Kingpin's megalomaniacal desire for power. By I972, now based in Las Vegas, Hydra planned to overthrow the U.S. government, but the intervention of Captain America and SHIELD ended that and forced the revelation that the Kingpin's son was really a duped pawn of the Red Skull. In an obvious propagandist harangue, the Red Skull claims that Hydra is, and always has been, a decoy to draw attention away from the dawning of the Fourth Reich. This statement was only true of those sections of Hydra he had duped under a puppet Supreme Hydra, and for a period of no more than two years previously, although it may have been infiltrated earlier by the Bruder-schaft.

That same year another Hydra group recaptured the Virus-9 bio-weapon, seized by the government sometime before, and currently being studied by biologist Henry Pym, but as Ant-Man he, and a miniaturised Hulk, foiled their deadly plans.

Hydra continued their obsessive search for new biochemical and germ weaponry, and it was not until I974, in Mexico, that they discovered the existance of the Cat People, and the legend of their fearsome 'Final Secret'. Surviving meetings with the Werewolf By Night and the newly created Tigra, the Hydra unit succumbed to the 'Final Secret', which proved to be the Black Plague, created by the first of the Cat People in the Middle Ages.

In I975 the main core of Hydra, having recovered from the Red Skull's manipulation, decided to change their operational methods and have super-villains among their ranks. This daring departure backfired when the super-villains seized control, with ex-Maggia gangboss Silvermane became the new Supreme Hydra. In a plot to destroy Fury District Attorney 'Foggy' Nelson was kidnapped as bait, unwittingly drawing Daredevil and Black Widow into the conflict. With the capture of section chiefs El Jaguar, Mankiller, Mentallo and Jackhammer, the

destruction of the ultimate Dreadnaught killer-rob and their sub-Shea Stadium HQ in New York, followed by the flight of Silvermane and his son Blackwing, Hydra was once more free of super-villains.

Once again Hydra withdrew and it s activities became unknown to the public. It was not until 1977 that Hydra reappeared in the form of Count Otto Vermis of Hydra-Central Europe, who discovered and recruited Spider-Woman, then known only as Arachne. His attempt to use her against SHIELD backfired and led to his death in an air crash.

Regaining control of Spider-Woman, and with the unwilling aide of Dr Kort, Hydra-London created a chemical composition which would mutate a legion of spider-warriors. Their first, and only, test subject was Alicia Masters, a choice which led to their defeat by the Thing, Invisible Girl, and a newly freed Spider-Woman.

In the United States Hydra remained most deadly; their activities secret, their plans unknown, their very location a mystery. Then, in 1980, Mentallo and the Fixer emerged as forerunners of a new Hydra assault on SHIELD itself. Hydra had been mentally dominated by the evil Baron Karza, tyrant of the Microverse, and together with the miniature fleet of the Homeworld, poured out of their hidden base under Florida's Fantasyworld, in a blitzkrieg against SHIELD and their Micronaut allies. In retrospect it would seem that only Hydra-Florida was involved in Karza's mad plans, and the main body of the organisation retained it's low profile.

Most recently, in 1982, we have yet to discover the mysterious connection between Hydra's Operation New Genesis, and the creation of Team America, whom Hydra would like to see terminated. The few images of the new Supreme Hydra behind these operations, would indicate a bald, teutonic-looking man, whose semi-militeristic clothing of jodpurs and leather jacket, are reminiscent of a German officer. It couldn't be him. Could it? I mean he is dead...Isn't he?

Hail Hydra! Immortal Hydra!

. . . . . .

CREDITS; All the art in GASP is by John Culbard except pps.3,4,5and 10, which are by Lilian Edwards.All characters depicted within are copyright their respective publishers,except Captain Kelvin!All articles are copyright their respective writers.You'd never know I was a law student,would you?(ed:)

Printed by G.U.S.R.C.

THE ECONOMICS OF COMICS

neil craig

The first issue of Dazzler was the most influential comic to be produced since Stan Lee started the Fantastic Four .

However before somebody looks for a suitable rubber room to put me in I should make it clear that Dazzler 1 was not in any way good(quite the contrary).The important things about it were that it was (a) distributed through the direct sales market only & (b) that Marvel sold 300,000 copies & thus made it a major financial success . Those last two words "financial success made the conglomerate masters of comicdom take notice of comic fandom & the direct sales market in a way that Adams, Byrne, Starlin et al could never do .

Since at least the early '70s comics had been undergoing a major change in both producers & market . The market change can be summed up as a declining market . The change of producers amounted to a large number of new artists joining the comic companies from fandom . These new artists were naturally of the same age as the older readers & saw themselves as still a part of fandom (this is not an unprecedented situation -many S.F. authors were originally young men & women in fandom) . Regretably this influx of new talent did not impress the corporate managers of publishers as much as it did the fans . In fact to a significant extent it was assumed that the decline in sales was due to the artists & writers playing to the stalls of fandom & ignoring the initially larger kids readership . There is probably some truth in this view , but not much . If it was Archie comics would now outsell everything else . In fact sales have generally declined since the "Golden Age" when (A) childrens' T.V. did not exist (American Saturday morning T.V. is choc a bloc with superhero cartoons) , (B) the family drugstore, which had been the backbone of comic distribution, had started to be replaced by multiple chains uninterested in low unit priced material .

And then came Dazzler no. 1 . This was the very first comic to be sold entirely through the fan market & it sold . The difference between the fan & newstand sales is that fan sales are non-returnable, whereas it is a very rare comic where even half of all copies are sold on newstands, so fan sales are obviously more profitable , & that fan sales allow the dealer to order titles in whatever quantities they choose, so that a good or desirable comic will sell many times the print run of the same comic on newstands .

It is less than two years since Dazzler came out & in that time the whole market orientation of comics has changed .Marvel have moved three titles from normal distribution to limit it to the fan market (which has allowed the stories to become much more experimental & adult) , it has produced Fanfare , Graphic Novels & shortly will start Epic Comics all aimed at fans (who , the aforementioned corporate bosses have now noticed have more money than kids) . This change is not limited to Marvel,

cont,on p. 31

VICTORY IN THE PACIFIC.

by JAMES GREER.

The question on the lips of many people reading this article will be "Who are Pacific Comics" British comics fans seem to be very blinkered in the range of comics which they read. There are probably quite a few fans who thought that Marvel was the only comics publisher before "The New Teen Titans" came out.

If you do read the fan press, you will have heard a lot about "alternative publishing" and "direct sales," and creators rights. Pacific Comics is a new alternative publisher, who only market their comics via direct sales. This means that their comics are available only at specialist comics stores or by post from comics dealers. The advantage of this is that most of the print-run is sold rather than the usual situation whereby most of the copies are returned by newsvendors who havent bothered to display them. By charging a little more for their comics, they have been able to spare us from annoying advertisements for Twinkies and Bubble Yum. The most significant difference, however, is that Pacific Comics only buy the first publication rights from the creators. The creator retains all other rights to their characters. Hence if you work for an alternative publisher and Dino de Laurentis wants to make a film based on your character (heaven forbid) then you get all the royalties rather than your publisher. In theory this should encourage artists and writers to create new characters.

Pacific Comics have been in business for a long time as a distributor and a publisher of portfolios. They only started publishing comics a year ago and rather than suddenly bring out a whole new line of comics suddenly as Atlas did, they have opted for the more sensible approach of releasing just a few comics at a time.

The first Pacific Comic is Captain Victory which so far has had seven issues.

Captain Victory is written and drawn by the prolific comics veteran, Jack Kirby.

The basic premise behind Captain Victory is a reaction against Speilberg's CE3K. Kirby believes that when earth comes into contact with extra-terrestrials, they will not be the harmless smiling creatures like the ones in CE3K, come to share the wonders of the Universe with us. Rather they will come to ravage and exploit us, in the same way that man does to many of the ecosystems on earth. He also finds the magnanimous welcome which the U.S Govt give the aliens, a little hard to swallow. This is another theme which is explored in the comic.

That we are going to be given a giant dose of Kirby's militaristic fantasies, is immediately obvious. The cover of issue I depicts Captain Victory blasting away at spaceships with two gigantic pistols which look as though they should weigh about 20 pounds each.

The villains of the /

piece in the series are the Insectons. They are a race of insect like humanoids. They are covered in chiton and possess antennae, wings and mandibles, yet they are bipedal and stand upright. Kirby has built up an entire insect society, consisting of workers, warriors and drones. They are ruled over by their Queen "A Lightning Lady", who possesses the power to throw out bolts of electricity and assisting her - a Regent. The ordinary members of the hive follow the Queen blindly. The insectons convert whole planets into hives where they can breed, using all the other life forms on the planets as a food source until the invaded planet is laid bare.

The Galactic Rangers are an Interplanetary police force, instituted by the Galactic Federation to uphold Intergalactic law.

We are gradually introduced to the Ranger crew of the Tiger. The commander of the spaceship is of course Captain Victory. Somewhat unconventionally, our hero is killed on the 9th page of issue I. However, not to worry. We are told that this has happened, 10 times already. The crew of the Tiger have many clones of Captain Victory in storage. All they have to do is bring out a new one and transfer Cap's memory storage unit from the old clone to the new one.

Executive Officer Martius Klavus is 2nd in command. Whenever he is in danger, he can use "Cyclotronic Conversion" to change places with a "Spirit Brother", a strange and powerful creature from a planet in his home star system. All of Klavus race have their own Spirit Brother.

The rest of the Ranger crew are equally bizarre. They are all humanoid but many have apparently evolved from other creatures. Orca from "Epsilon Eridani", whose job is "special services" is fish-like. Gunnery Officer Tarin from Alpha Centauri has the head of a lion. Mister Mind is a rare creature with a gigantic head. He has an enormous capacity for logic and calculation and has telepathic powers.

All in all C.V. is a very entertaining strip. Kirby has taken the time and effort to create a realistic universe. It is a lot better than most of the strips he did recently for Marvel. The main fault is the dialogue. It often verges on the ridiculous. "What in solar soap suds is it?! " and "shred my britches and melt my boots !" being examples.

However, Kirby does show a great deal of enthusiasm for the strip and this is infectious.

Issues 4, 5 and 6 carry a back-up humour strip called "The Goozlebobber. Kirby created this strip when publisher Steve Schanee asked him to create the most bizarre strip ever. Kirby has delivered.The Goozlebobber is a humanoid creature who has escaped from the special collection

of bizarre species aboard the Tiger. He has big feet, a cape and a big red clown's nose. His appearance is hilarious. He has the ability to change his appearance by creating illusions. His other abilities include giving people around him diarrhea! The goozlebobber has escaped to earth and it is the responsibility of the Mister Mind to track him down. While on earth, the goozlebobber drops in on an earth family, tangles with the police and undergoes many bizarre transformations, on one occasion taking on the appearance of President Reagan.

STARSLAYER

Starslayer is the second Pacific comic. It is created, written and drawn by Mike Grell who has previously worked on Warlord, the Legion of Superheroes and Green Lantern/Green Arrow. Starslayer is an attempt to mix sword and sorcery and futuristic science fiction. It is almost an opposite to Grell's successful creation, Warlord. Whereas, Warlord puts a modern man in a primitive barbaric society, Starslayer puts a barbarian into the future.

The hero Torin Mac Quillon is a celtic barbarian. Just before his imminent death at the end of Roman swords, Torin is transported into the far future. There he is told by a beautiful woman, Tamara, that he has been brought into a time where man has colonized many of the other planets.

Interplanetary war has broken out and the colonists of the other planets are trying to gain possession of earth. The only hope for earth is if it can recover a legendary amulet which contains the formula to a secret power source which the "ancients" had. Earth has long ago lost the art of making war (some hope!). Therefore, the earth government searched the past for a great warrior who could look for the pieces of the amulet which are scattered about the solar system. This is an obvious plot device and of course sets up the hero for lots of galactic adventures in the issues to come.

Personally, I think this comic is a lot of nonsense. I am a great fan of the Warlord comic which Grell created. I think it is a great pity that D.C. scared him away by continually having his work inked by Vince Colletta, despite incessant protestations by Grell.

This effort is vastly inferior not only in the nonsensical storyline but also in the art which is not nearly as good as the early issues of Warlord, or Grell's excellent G.A. / G.L. strips. The panels are very crowded and overlap in a disorganized fashion. The ugly misshapen and oversized speech balloons add to the chaos.

I look forward to Grell's next comic, "Sable". I hope he doesn't let us down this time.

THE MISSING MAN

There have been quite a few interestin, back-up features in Pacific comics.

One of them is "The Missing Man" who debuts in Captain Victory 6. The Missing Man is created, written and drawn by Steve Ditko. Ditko co-created Spiderman with Stan Lee and was the first and most famous artist of Dr. Strange. His artistic style is simple and cartoonish compared with most current comics artists. However, he is able to create many strange and original special effects without cluttering his drawings with an over-abundance of unnecessary lines.

The Missing Man is in reality Syd Mane who apparently works as a computer engineer. However, in his spare time he works for "Ma's Detective Agency" as the Missing Man. The Missing Man appears to have no body and his limbs can separate and rearrange themselves making it very difficult for anyone to try to shoot him or strike him.

The Missing Man is Ditko at his weirdest and best.

THE ROCKETEER.

The Rocketeer appears in issues 2 and 3 of Starslayer.

It is written and drawn by a new comics artist, Dave Stevens. Not only is it the best Pacific Comics strip thus far, it also has to be the best new strip of 1982. It is set in the thirties and is possibly inspired by the "King of the Rocketmen" movie serial of that period.

Cliff Secord is a stunt pilot, struggling to make ends meet, who comes across a stolen experimental back-pack rocket engine which was stashed in his hanger by theives on the run from the police. The police were chasing them for speeding and didn't know about the engine.

Cliff decides the engine could be the answer to all his problems. However, he finds that he has to use the engine sooner than he expected.

The strip is beautifully drawn and captures the atmosphere of the period.

The Missing Man and the Rocketeer are going to appear together in a title called "Pacific Comics Presents". I strongly recommend all comics fans (and potential comics fans!) to check this title out.

MS.MYSTIC.

Pacific Comics is going to include a superhero in their roster.

Ms.Mystic is previewed in a four page strip in Captain Victory 3.

It is written and drawn by Neal Adams. Ms.Mystic was burnt at the stake as being a witch, centuries ago. She survived by casting a spell to transport her to an alternate reality. Only today has she been able to return to earth.

Ms.Mystic is able to command the elements to do her bidding. However, unlike most superheroines, her quarry is not theives, counterfeiters and the like. Instead she fights what she, and her creator Neal Adams consider to be much more important criminals. Those who pollute the atmosphere and kill animals for sport. She is an ecological superheroine. The theme of ecology concern will continue in the series when it begins in it's own title soon. If some of Adam's concern is transmitted to his readership then it will be a worthwhile exercise. Maybe someone should buy Reagan and his friends a copy!

So far,Pacific Comics have given us two reasonable strips(C.V.and Starslayer) and three very good ones.The most exciting thing is that they give their creators all rights to their own characters,which will undoubtedly attract more new talents such as Dave Stevens as well as old hands like Neal Adams.A new similiar comics group is about to start publishing, "First Comics",who have already signed up Frank Brunner and Joe Staton.If First and Pacific can attract all the top talent,then we could be looking at the creation of the next Marvel and DC.

THE HAMMER THUDS

by Madeleine Campbell

"When lame Dr. Donald Blake strikes his wooden walking stick on the ground,it becomes the mystic mallet Mjollnir and Blake is transformed into.....the Mighty Thor !"

Thor first made his colourful appearance in Marvel's "Journey Into Mystery"no.83 and has remained a popular Marveldom figure ever since,both in his own comic,as a member of the Avengers,and in guest appearances in numerous other Marvel publications.

Some of Thor's foes have proved to be immensely popular with the fans,with frequent requests in the letter column for the return of such nasties as Ulik,the troll who is forever attempting to take over the world or even Asgard itself with highly sophisticated mechanical technology,the Absorbing Man,Crusher Creel,also a frequent enemy who can absorb any power weilded against him.The Grey Gargoyle and Firelord also inhabit the ranks of Thor's most common adversaries.

If Thor is so mighty,why then can he not destroy these evil characters outright?The answer is twofold - if Thor killed all of his opponents,Marvel would soon have a redundant superhero on its hands,as Thor would be impossible to beat,and also there would be no thrill for the readers in seeing Thor win all the time.However,against the aforementioned super-villains,Thor has to use brains as well as strength and has the additional handicap of being so noble that any unneccessary killing appals him.

The thunder god's principal foe is undoubtedly his half-brother,Loki,whose excellent,incredibly well-planned schemes to destroy Thor and Odin,marry Sif(Thor's betrothed),and either rule or lay waste to Asgard,are always defeated by the mighty son of Odin.

Asgard itself is a rather complex society where wealth and poverty live side by side - it's certainly surprising to discover that at least one Valkyrie,Hildegard,a trusted friend of Odin,comes from and

indeed still lives with a poor family.Yet the discrepancy in wealth is not the only factor to consider here - the constant intrigue,incessant lust for battle,and various love stories of the characters form a finely-balanced world of high technology,magic and volatile emotions, where lust of ambition and greed of any kind are constant themes.

The world of Asgard has gradually increased its panoply of characters - even to the inclusion of those utterly unknown to Norse myth such as Karnilla,the Norn Queen,often painted as an enemy of Asgard but whose love for Balder all too often leads her to lend Odin and Thor support in any crisis which has need of her magical powers.

Asgard,however,is not alone in the Marvel cosmos in being a world peopled by gods.The panoply of Egyptian and Olympian deities - notably Hercules,Pluto and Zeus have received considerable attention from the devoted scripters and artists,including John Buscema,Jack Kirby and Roy Thomas.

And what of Earth?Odin has frequently referred to Earth as a "mudball" but Thor has immense loyalty to this particular planet - it is after all the home of his alter-ego,Donald Blake and also the home of the woman -as opposed to the goddess Sif - he loves,Jane Foster.The eternal triangle of Sif,Jane and Thor has been partly solved by merging the spirits of the two females together to save Jane from death.Unfor--tunately,even by the laws of Asgard,the thunderer can only marry one half of this dual being - but that's unlikely to happen while the writers can still wring a good story out of the Jane-Sif conflict.Of course,Sif was raised as a warrior goddess but Jane has really always been too much the stereotypical weak and fainting female until now to be a worthy bride for Thor.

Thor himself is more a warrior than a lover though.Time and place are no barriers for him;he is able to travel millions of years through time and light-years acrossthe universe to aid aliens fleeing from the destruction of their home world such as the Rigellian Colonisers.From all this,the reader might regard Thor as a straight-laced eternal champion - true,but also false.Thor has enough sense of humour to make jokes,likes booze and is not averse to seduction(although both Sif and Jane seem to be sacrosanct)- but he's not always faithful as he's prov--ed to any willing wench he takes a fancy to.He's even been beaten in battle,usually by magic or Odin's decree as the All-Father feels Thor is often too arrogant.In fact,it seems that,taking everything into account,Thor may be a god,but he's still all too human,and hence the root-cause of his popularity.

ASPECTS OF ALTERNATE REALITIES WITHIN A MULTIVERSAL CONTINUUM

A selection of notes by John Culbard, based on the demented ravings of an alchoholic, neo-Zen, quantum structure philosopher.

The mere mention of 'alternative worlds', 'Earth Two', or 'What If?' is enough to cause a good number of staunch comic readers to clutch their stomachs and groan in anticipation of throwing up. I know that and I pity them. I have revelled in the concept of the 'other reality' ever since the day Gardner Fox drew a line through the history of DC Comics and placed National and All-American's 1940's publications into another universe. Even the subsequent discovery that in sub-particle physics the minute packets of energy which are the building blocks of the entire universe, exist in a state of probability.., that at any given moment any particular particle may or may not exist in this universe, could not surpass that original revelation. In an attempt to construct an overview of alternities I have subdivided the article into sections in the hope of rendering it comprehensible. Stick with it.

The Basic Reality.... Each individual comic title or strip must be assumed to exist within the boundaries of it's own potential reality, having no links with any other potential reality even in publications by a single company, such as DC's Claw, Arak, Beowulf, or Warlord. It is only when the characters of one title or series interacts with any other can a particular reality expand it's structure to embrace previously solitary existances within a single overall worldline. As, for example, when the creation of the Justice League of America drew the potentially diverse realities of individual heroes, who had never met, into a single worldline wherein they all exist. If the background universe of two characters is similar, preferably identical, then even a short appearance or cameo can confirm the single nature of their dual realities, whereas if their meetings are difficult to reconcile then further explanations may need to be invoked.

Major Realities....Apart from our own existance, known variously as Earth-Prime or Earth-Real, the most obvious current alternative realities are those of DC's Earth-One and Marvel's Earth-M, each consisting of a large number of the titles produced by the company concerned. From these we proceed to other Earths connected in some way to one or the other of these major realities. Taking DC's Earth-One as our starting point we reach Earth-Two, a close alternative world which diverged at some time in the pre-historic past but which has been held close to Earth-One by the unusual prevelance of parallel

events, such as major historical incidents up to and including World War Two and the coexistance of numerous persons who exist on both realities, from Superman to the Joker, although they may appear decades later on Earth-One. Earth-Three on the other hand is a world which diverged in an equally primitive age, but whose history has evolved as a strange mirror of Earth-One, developing it's most ancient civilisations in America and discovering the 'new world' of Europe, until a coincidently similar 'now' has occurred where only the heroic Dr. Alex Luthor stands in the path of the super-villains of the Crime Syndicate of America.

On Earth-X we have an example of the varient reality, a world once identical to the Quality comics of the 1940's, itself designated as Earth-Quality, where a point of divergence takes place during it's World War Two when the Allied Powers fall to Nazi Domination and the majority of Quality superheroes die in battle, leaving the survivors to form the Freedom Fighters. Another example of the varient universe is Earth-S upon which Captain Marvel and the heroes of the Fawcett Comic Universe exist. At first sight it appears to be identical to Earth-Fawcett, a world with no connections to Earth-One, but by the revelation that Captain Marvel Jnr. is the brother of Kid Eternity, a being who does not exist on Earth-Fawcett, it becomes obvious that Earth-S is an almost identical parallel universe.

In the Earth-Marvel multiverse alternate worlds were few until the proliferation of other realities revealed by the Watcher, which are so numerous and transient as to be classified as minor realities. There are, however, several major Earth-M varients worthy of note due to their reappearance. Other-Earth is basically a world in which Earth-M's villainous Squadron Sinister are the heroic Squadron Supreme , core members of a JLA-alternate super-group, where history is similar to but by no means identical with that of Earth-M. The other major varient is a world where only Reed Richards and Ben Grimm took part in the space shot, turning Reed into the Thing, and Ben into a combined Mr. Fantastic and Human Torch, although after Ben's marriage to Sue Storm he had Reed remove his now unwanted powers.

Other major Earths may be derived from the publications of other major companies past and present, just waiting for the day when one vast interconnected web of universes comes into being.

Minor Realities....These universes are no less possible than Major Realities, merely seen less often, including titles of short duration with no obvious links to a major reality, such as Shade or Star Hunters; single story appearances, and 'imaginary stories'.

The other main source of such worlds is from comic-related books, cinema, and television. These produce new diversity insofar as the Earths of the movie and television Supermen, for example, do not contradict 'tradi- onal reality' by their deviations from the excepted histories of Earth-One and Earth-Two, being merely the revelation of further extant realities.

Multiple Existance....The concepts inherent in such a multiplicity of realities was bound to reveal the existance of numerous aspects of a single being living on more than one world, each ignorant of the others. Although all beings have potentially vast numbers of alternate selves, we are usually confined to knowing of a single reality such as that of Dr. Fate, or the dual worlds of Wonder Woman, but we do have an extreme example as typified by Plastic Man.

First known on the Quality universe (Police Comics @ I) where he had a long and active career, he is also known, by reference, to have died in the Quality varient universe of Earth-X (JLA @ 107). Another alternative emerged in the 1960's (Plastic Man @ I) who was seen to be the son of an original Plastic Man, of either Earth-Quality or of a previously unseen Quality varient. Next to be seen, appearing with Batman (Brave and Bold @ 76, 95) on Earth-One (?) was a straight, if rather weak character who cannot be truly reconciled with the later appearance of yet another Plastic Man (Plastic Man @ II). He, along with alternate idiot foil Woozy Winks, must exist in yet another Quality varient universe, despite a meeting with the presumed Superman of Earth-One (DC Comics Present @ 39) (An event explicable within the bounds of a Multiversal Shift). Most recently revealed has been the existance of a hitherto unknown Plastic Man on Earth-Two (All-Star Squadron @ I). This in turn expands the concept of Earth-Two, showing it not to be merely the image of DC's 1940's heroes, but a reality which also contains alternative varient characters of other major Earths coexistant within the 1940's time period.

Synchronous Event....Talking of the '40's, it was then that the best known example of the synchronous event occurred, in the shape of World War Two. It was an event which took place, with minor variations , across many realities of the multiverse that existed within the same time frame. On Earth-One the war was fought much as it was on Earth-Prime, but included such combatants as Sgt. Rock, the Unknown Soldier, the Losers, etc. Many of these fighters would survive the war, some living on into the dawning of Earth-One's Age Of Heroes, while on another varient, known to exist according to the statements of Robert Kanigher, these same characters would all be victims of a

war which would let none survive beyond their time.

On Earth-Two the war, while following similar lines and containing a number of alternate warriors, including Sgt. Rock, and the Unknown Soldier, was also fought by the new heroes of the Justice Society, and the All-Star Squadron. Earth-Marvel produced the Invaders and the Liberty Legion to combat the super-foes of their Axis Powers, while soldiers like Sgt. Fury and his Commandos helped to hold back a Germany whose technology was far in advance of Earth-Prime, being able to produce the V2 rocket prototypes by early 1942.

There was scarcely a reality extant in the 1940's whose heroes did not fight in some World War or another, and fortunately there were few like the devastated Earth-X, which was dominated by a Nazi victory for decades.

Alternative Futures....Another outcome of multiversal alternities is the potential diversification of future realities from a present single worldline. The best documented futures exist for Earth-One, with the major worldline, that which is most probable under the number of known extrapolative variables, leading to the 30th Century Earth of the Legion of Super-Heroes. Major alternates to this include Earth-AD (After Disaster) which diverges from Earth-One, or a varient of Earth-One, in the mid-1980's, and the 30th Century Earth East/West which will not diverge until sometime in the next few centuries.

Known future heroes, notably Tommy Tomorrow, Space Ranger, Star Hawkins, etc., would seem to exist in future universes in which the other planets of our solar system have been colonised by alien humanoids, sometime in their alternate pasts, or in the potential near futures of Earth-One. Of course mainline Earth-One could contain alternate versions of the various characters in adventures which do not contravene it's own future history.

Earth-Marvel has also entered the realm of varient futures, many of which have been tied to a single worldline which involves the 1982 Ozone Breakdown, the 1988 starlaunch of Vance Astro, the 1990's Bionic Wars, with Deathlock, followed by the Martian Invasion of 2001, and the Killraven Rebellion of 2018. This world would eventually colonise the solar system over the next millenia, before the Badoon Invasion of 3007. However, as neither the Ozone Breakdown seems imminent and Vance Astrovik's personal fate has been changed, this future now exists only for an alternative universe. Several future fates have been shown for the X-Men including an Earth subjugated by the Sentinels, involving the death of most super-beings, but whose potential for mainline existance has been greatly reduced, if not completely

aborted, by the negation of the incident which led to it's creation. More recently a further reality, which led to a different, but equally fatal end for the X-Men, was partially revealed, and possibly, but not definately, prevented.

Multiversal Shift....Among the many worlds there is the problem of the potential existance of a momentous Earth upon which both DC's Earth-One and Earth-Marvel share a single varient reality, which unless it is purely imaginary,(itself a facet of multiversal reality) is a pretty packed planet. A further intriguing possiblity for this difficult reality is the concept of the multiversal shift, in which an occasional realignment of the structure of the multiverse necessitates a temporary overlap of space-time co-ordinates. During this time both universes would exist as if they had always been one, allowing interaction between previously seperate realities to occur without any realisation of their prior status, until the readjustment is complete, the two universes move apart, and all knowledge of each others existance is consigned to the quality of a half remembered dream.

Ongoing Progression of Parallel Realities....In theory the current reality of any worldline which we are observing need not be the original reality which we first started to observe, for if it is only in retrospect that we can distinguish the seperation of such characters as Superman, Batman, and Wonder Woman, each into two distinct beings, then it is possible for the Fantastic Four of the '80's to be of a different, but closely related reality from those created in the '60's.

Such a view would solve the dichotomy of the relative time-lag, exemplified by Reed Richards and Ben Grimm's military service in the I940's, which would become the Korean, or even Viet-Nam war service of a Reed and Ben who did not become super-beings until the early '70's, while still following the carsers of their earlier selves in every detail but that of date, and enabling all flashbacks to be equally relevant to the current characters as well as to the originals who were actually depicted in the earlier adventures.

This continual progression of looking into a later, but otherwise indistinguishable reality would explain why young Franklin Richards, born in I968 (Fantastic Four Annual @ 6) is still only about five, for we are seeing the current Franklin, while the one born in I968 is now about fourteen, on his original reality.

It also frees Spider-Man from being the same early Spider-Man whose parents are stated to have died in June of I949 (Spider-Man Annual @ 5) and creating a thirty-four year old Peter Parker, who has hopefully left college.

Finally this system allows for DC's stated policy of the continuous existance of a permenantly twenty-nine year old Superman, an ageless cast of charaters, and a Superboy whose chronological background is always thirteen years behind the 'now' of Superman.

Well, if there are any readers left, I hope that everything has been cleared up. Now if I can only get someone to publish 'Perceptible Effects of Relataviatic Time Dilation in Altered States of Probability'.

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cont. from p.17

D.C. will shortly bring out their own limited distribution titles & Pacific Comics have already appeared & are expanding by leaps & bounds . Further everybody & his duck are offering creators rights (if only in limited cases) ,bonuses for large sales & anything they can think of to get fan favourites to join their stable . Evenfor the normal titlem it is obvious that nobody is insisting that they must write for an audience whose average age is 14 .

In the coming years I think there will be great changes in comics - mainly in the the direction of one-off big name deals which will result in a lot of really exciting stuff (even if it will cost more) .

The direction of comic marketing is no longer on the hands of kids - pity isn't it .

. . . . . .

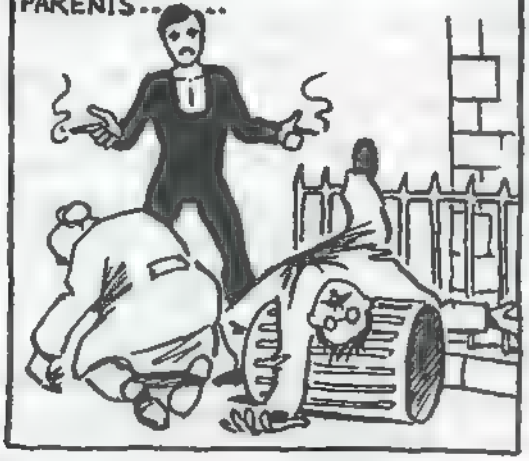
A WORD FROM OUR SPONSOR :as we have a little space to fill,and our bashful artist neglected to put any credits (or indeed even a title)on the following strip,this seems a good opportunity to explain a little about the genesis of our gallant Glaswegian superhero.Captain Kelvin is drawn and created by resident stalwart artist John Culbard,with a little creative Kibbitzing from the rest of the Friends.Most of that outside help was devoted to finding a name for our hapless hero who remained defiantly nameless till practically deadline.Saltire(the St.Andrew's Cross)was the original,fairly sane suggestion;from there,things got sillier,ranging from Caber,The Indestructible Man(a secret SNP supporter) to The Procrastinator,a hero who'd rather not actually <u>fight</u> till tomorrow....finally we hit on the idea of naming our hero,like 46 others,"Captain"plus a place name.Hence Captain Kelvin,Kelvinside being a somewhat - ah - nice area of Glasgow;soon to be joined in hopefully future issues oy Private Partick,General Giffnock,and the rest of the gang! Take it away,John.....

I AM THE PEEPER, AND I'M TIRED OF WATCHING THE SAME BORING WORLDS, SO I HAVE TURNED MY GAZE UPON AN UNSEEN UNIVERSE NEXT DOOR AT A CRITICAL MOMENT, JUST AS THE LAST SURVIVOR OF AN ENTIRE UNIVERSE PACKED FULL OF HIGHLY IMPROBABLE SUPER-BEINGS IS SENT TO A PLACE OF SAFETY ...SOMEWHERE NEAR EDINBURGH....

THERE HE IS FOUND BY AN ELDERLY COUPLE WHO RAISE HIM WITHOUT REPORTING HIM TO THE AUTHORITIES, IN CONTRAVENTION OF THE CHILDREN'S (SCOTLAND) ACT 1975.

BUT IT IS NOT LONG BEFORE THE INFANT'S POWERS DEVELOP

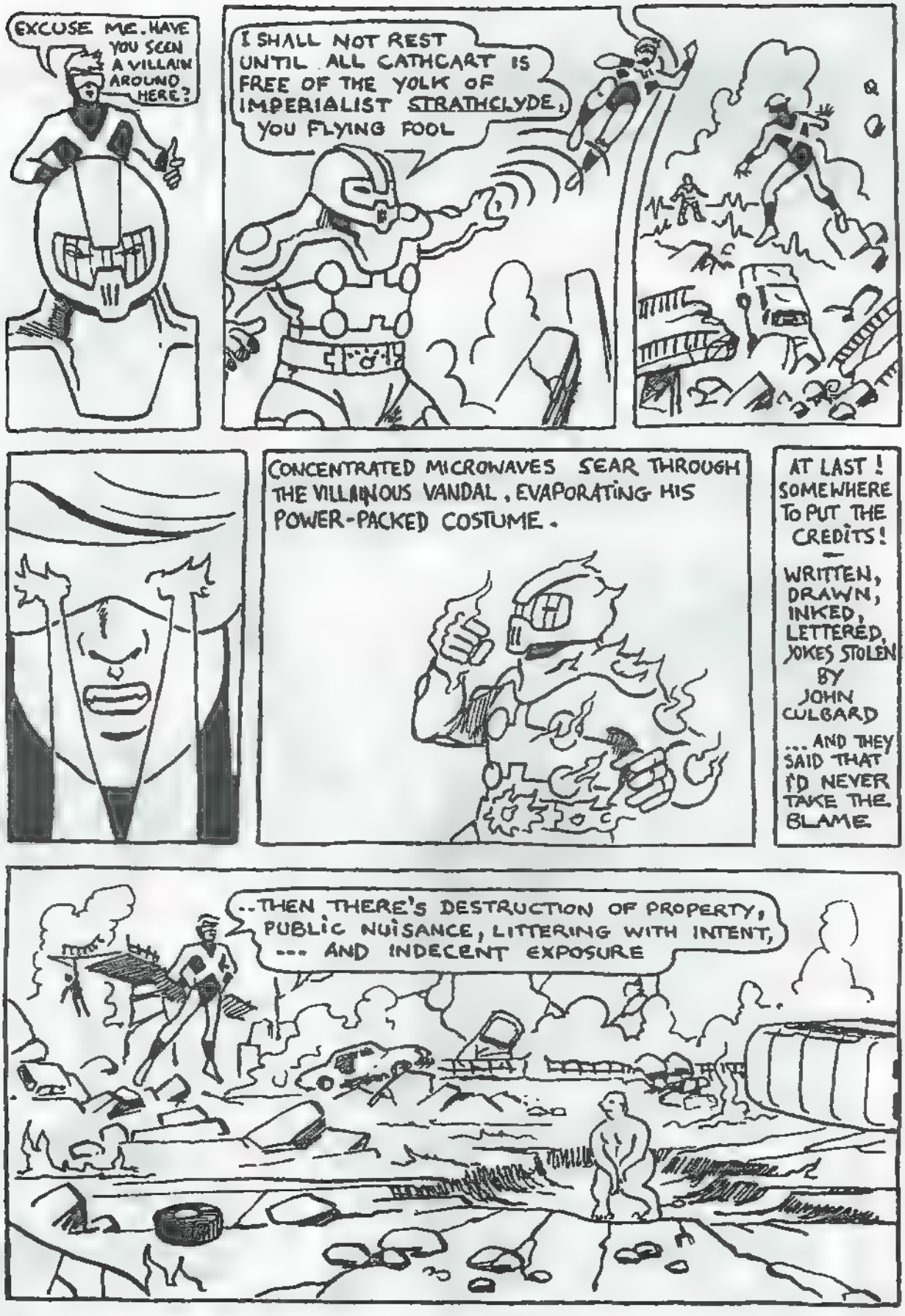
THEN ONE EDINBURGH FESTIVAL, AN INSANE MIME ARTIST ENDED THE LIVES OF THE YOUTH'S FOSTER PARENTS.....



AND THE ORPHANED ALIEN, SICKENED OF CULTURE, MOVED TO GLASGOW, VOWING TO COMBAT EVIL ..BY DONNING TIGHTS, LEOTARD, AND ONE WAY FOSTER GRANT EYE-SHADES --- AS

CAPTAIN KELVIN

PASSING DOWN SAUCHIEHALL STREET, OUR PLAIN-CLOTHED HERO CASUALLY PRACTISES HIS INCREDIBLE POWERS
OOOUCH! MY IMPLANTED ALARM ALERT! TROUBLE MUST BE VERY NEAR
IMMEDIATELY HE RACES TO A SECLUDED SPOT
GENTLEMEN
AND TRANSFORMS HIMSELF IN A SUDDEN RELEASE OF ENERGY....
WHOOM
NOT A MOMENT TOO SOON, POOR CHAP
INTO SCOTLA GREATEST
HE SCANS THE CITY WITH HIS SUPER-SIGHT
I WISH THESE PANELS WEREN'T SO CRAMPED
MEANWHILE NEAR CHARING CROSS
STRATHCLYDE COUNCIL DARE TO REFUSE INDEPENDENCE TO CATHCART, THEN GLASGOW WILL SUFFER THE WRATH OF THE INCREDIBLE QUAKER-MASS
NOW THATS WHAT I CALL A POSER


EXCUSE ME. HAVE YOU SEEN A VILLAIN AROUND HERE?
I SHALL NOT REST UNTIL ALL CATHCART IS FREE OF THE YOLK OF IMPERIALIST STRATHCLYDE, YOU FLYING FOOL
CONCENTRATED MICROWAVES SEAR THROUGH THE VILLAINOUS VANDAL, EVAPORATING HIS POWER-PACKED COSTUME.
AT LAST! SOMEWHERE TO PUT THE CREDITS!
WRITTEN, DRAWN, INKED, LETTERED, JOKES STOLEN BY JOHN CULBARD
... AND THEY SAID THAT I'D NEVER TAKE THE BLAME
..THEN THERE'S DESTRUCTION OF PROPERTY, PUBLIC NUISANCE, LITTERING WITH INTENT, --- AND INDECENT EXPOSURE

What If 35:"What If Elektra Had Lived?"by Frank Miller and Terry Austin.

It was inevitable,I suppose.Whether it had to be so soon,so short,and so totally unsatisfying,is more open to question.One can't fault the art,though it must be said that Miller's trademarks of silent fight scenes,large close ups of eyes and numerous gory deaths,are beginning,just barely,to inspire familiarity rather than attention - though not contempt. And Austin,whose work is so sadly needed over some other artists,is both unneccessary and over-fussy when combined with Miller.

In truth,though,it's not the art,but the plot,which should have made this issue special.In the context of Daredevil's own book,it was impossible for Miller to truely alter the entire future direction of the comic by introducing Elektra as either permanent ally or nemesis of the lead character,and still more unlikely that his superiors would allow the other obvious alternative,a final conflict between Daredevil and Elektra to be played out to its conclusion.What we saw in 181,while a classic of its kind,was still a cop-out,an avoidance of both these pitfalls;Elektra's neccessary removal was put into the capable hands of Bullseye and DD's isolation and moral integrity were retained unscathed.

What If,presenting as it does,a one-shot alternative universe, offered the ideal opportunity for Miller to attempt the impossible.Indeed, when he originally offered his services to pencil,ink and write this story it seemed this might be his intended purpose.(Contrast the dire What If Phoenix Hadn't Died,left to Duffy and Bingham).Perhaps it was.Sadly,in this reviewers eyes,out of the number of more satisfactory conclusions there could have been to the Elektra saga,a wholly unlikely one is chosen, which gives us both an Elektra and a DD whose characters seem distorted in the extreme,and a tone of sickly sentimentality which Miller seemed to toy

with and thankfully discard in the first work of his oeuvre,issue 168.We are ex--pected to believe that Matt,whose blind(sic)devotion to the law has been repeatedly stressed,would abandon its precepts to protect a multiple killer;we are expec--ted also to believe that Elektra would abandon her self-protective frozen disdain for and actual hatred of,Matt(see p.3,ish175)simply to save her own skin.I <u>can</u> imagine her dragging herself to her former lover when mortally wounded;I cannot imagine her entrusting her safety to a potential en--emy when less grievously hurt.Most of all,I cannot im--agine either of these people, (and Miller,to do him credit, has made them sufficiently real to discuss like this),so tied to the world and so seperated by past hurts,simply throwing up their present cares,morals and obligations and retreating to some orange coloured idyll, "half a world away".What If 35 should have been an opportunity to face harsh conclusions. Instead we are fobbed off with consequence-avoiding happy-ever-afters.

(Lilian Edwards)

NEWS FLASH:For anyone that doesn't know,the Sunday Times has decided it is About Time it has a comic strip of its own,in the fine old tradition of Doonesbury,Peanuts,or,nearer to home,Angus Ogg(all of which liberally illustrated its article on the topic,a nice change from the White Lions of Timbatzwani or wherever.)To this end then,it's announced a competition for the best original strip,offering boodles of money,and even better,instant stardom as a resident of the pages of the World's Greatest Newspaper. Could <u>you</u> be the next Segal and Schuster ?

This has been a registered Editorial Fill-in.

INVENTION

23rd - 25th September 1983
Glasgow's Eighth Science Fiction Convention.
To be held at the Central Hotel.

Guest Of Honour: CHRIS BOYCE

Award winning author of CATCHWORLD, EXTRATERRESTRIAL ENCOUNTER, BRAINFIX and many short stories and articles. He is a well known figure at local Cons and regular contributor to Spaceflight and Science Fiction meetings.

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Also in the hotel will be a combined alternate and fan programme, an extensive video programme, book room, games room, computer room and anyone else that we can squeeze in.

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INVENTION will be held at the Central Hotel, the staff of which should be used to Cons by then. Room rates are:

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ATTENDING - £9.00 Until ALBACON II
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